Marcel Ray Duriez

Nevaeh

Book: 77

Broken Record

Yet there is nothing wrong with polygamy, the sad thing here is you have to look that word up don't you? Yet everyone is a scarlet letter, yet being me I have been said to do adultery. Why is it okay in the catholic faith to think you would have to end your partner's life, when getting a divorce is a sin yet killing is not? And you think your right in your twisted faith of not being able to read to know yet think to believe like a simpleton, praying for forgiveness by something that was created for man, by man to make war, shaming, and shunning.

Part: 1

Haven- Call me slut remember I am nothing more than your imbolent characterizing a combination of incompetence, ignorance, stupidity, and inferiority.

I remember your mother and that is how you were made. It's like heresy, a. An opinion or a doctrine at variance with established religious beliefs, especially dissension from or denial of Roman Catholic dogma by a professed believer or baptized church member. A controversial or unorthodox opinion or doctrine, as in politics, philosophy, or science. It’s like hierarchy, a system or organization in

which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.

I never explained the death of my adopted sister ‘The End of All Hope church,’ that I went to for years basically deemed us as witchcraft because of me they drugged my adopted sister to the basement a letter on fire as a child as a young girl and now she wants the church that we once went to or so the legend goes. All because, I was going to lose my second virginity, do you want to? I remember saying that to the pastor.

I have been through the Amish shunning is the use of social exclusion as the method used to enforce Amish church rules. Contrary to popular belief, Amish shunning does not end all social interaction, but it does involve rituals that remind the wayward of their sin and seek to bring them back into fellowship.

Amish members may no longer eat at the same table as you. This means that when you attend an Amish gathering like a wedding or funeral, you must sit apart from the Church members when food is served.

Members may not do business with you. This can be a real hardship if

you buy from and sell to your Amish neighbors.

There have been a few lawsuits over the church denying the ex-member a right to make a living. Of course, lawsuits are forbidden by the Ordnung so this just shows that there is no repentance.

Members may not ride in your car. If you visit your family they are forbidden to ride with you, even though they are allowed to ride with their “English” neighbor.

Members cannot receive anything from you. Friends and family can help you by giving you money or things that you need. But they are forbidden to accept anything from you.

For example, if when visiting your Amish family, you want to serve a glass of water to your parents, you must leave it

on the table for one of your younger siblings to give to your parents. Since your siblings are not yet members of the Amish church, they are not yet bound to the rules applying to shunning.

Scientology shunning, called “disconnection”, forbids its members from interacting with a "suppressive" person. No calls, no letters, no contact.

When a Jehovah's Witness is "disfellowshipped"(shunned), all members including immediate family drop all contact. A disfellowshipped relative “should be made to appreciate that his status has changed, that he is no longer welcome in the home nor is he a preferred companion."

In some cultures and religions violators of doctrine can be put to death.

Tame in comparison, Amish shunning is used as a tool to convince the wayward ex-member to come back into the fold.

-And-

My family was banned and not asked to come back, but we did anyway, and you can see what happened for yourself. I think one of the hardest things is getting older and seeing the childhood that you saw. Taking holy communion in a white dress now, now in a white wedding dresses, yet pregnant beforehand, with their small baby bump, now getting married off, with a life that was not held back in away way, by being the same type

of animals, in a cult of a commonwealth, in a simple town, yet this is what is running in my head not yet blown out yet by the seaside by cop scenario, that was playing out by me in there flashlights being deliberately and violently killed in the massacre, lost in the remembrances of time, you look back on those days and say oh well.

This is how I died, the only thing I could do is take the AK and spray for fame, by dragging all of them like my teachers' teachers down to the basement of the church out by the mop of their hair Nitzy style at point-blank range and spray

their brains all over the brick walls in the darkness the only thing I could see was the flashing of end of my barrel, round after round, of not taking any more SHIT, I felt that was everybody's justice for being in the class I was made to be a simpleton wanting nothing more than to worship in faith.

Your time is limited, so don't think you have forever… living someone else’s life when it's still going to be all the same, that is what my tombstone said, I have seen a century once in my life- yet stayed the age of 14 all those days after my own ending.

~Haven~

I would like to tell you about something that happened to me when I was a boy of 14 years old. In the beginning, I was a "pretty" skinny, average tall boy, small-boned, with completely feminine traits. For as long as I can remember, I used to love to play dress-up with dolls and dress up as girls. Since puberty, this one has taken on a whole new excitement.

It was at this time that a very exciting event occurred. My parents and sisters were on their way to Queensland to attend a conference but I had to stay with my aunt to finish the exam in school. My aunt and two of my cousins were

tending a small farm near a quiet farming village.

My Aunt Joan was a 35-year-old attractive girl who lived in Sydney. My cousins Abigail and Jailine were very attractive, 17 and 14 respectively. They were all pretty and feminine in their outfits and groomers. The farm, about three hours from Sydney, ten minutes from the village, and one hour from town was somewhat isolated and the weather was so cold that not many people visited.

My aunt was subconsciously jealous of being the only boy in our families, and I think that was the driving force of what was about to happen.

My family left early Monday morning and my aunt picked me up after school. Auntie had to make a quick trip to town to hand over some of the clothes she had changed and we stayed around the house. On her return, she decided to take some old cans of paint to the shed. I stumbled a little and one of my cans spilled over me.

My clothes were just painted but destroyed. I took a shower and went to the bedroom to find a lovely green dress on the bed. There was also a lace camisole and matching panties.

Called My aunt to ask where my clothes were and said that my bag must

have left in my family's car by accident and that she also left a bag with my cousin's jeans at home too. "You will have to wear something for the next two weeks and that's all," said the aunt. I made some protests and went to my room.

While I knew I would have fun wearing beautiful clothes, I knew I was young I had to pretend I wasn't going to like it. A few minutes later, Abigail (whom I was quite close to) came over and said that even though she knew I didn't want to dress up, that was the only thing to do, and she and Jailin wouldn't laugh at me or anything else. Jaylynn came up at the time and promised not to laugh or tell

anyone. She said I had to get dressed because there was no one else around anyway. They both promised again not to tell anyone and then saw me alone.

I couldn't believe what was happening, of course, I love to dress up beautifully and they wouldn't even think of me, let alone laugh. I had a perfect excuse that was offered to me as I saw it.

I put on lace underpants and then put on the green dress. There was also a pair of white lace upper socks and a pair of black shoes with a buckle. I looked at myself in the mirror and after I missed out on the last hairstyles that looked so good. I was so thrilled and delighted that

the dress had a full skirt and petticoat, which would cover the marks of my enthusiasm.

It was time to leave the room. My aunt and my cousins were busy in the kitchen preparing dinner and didn't care much about me. My aunt told me that made more sense. Abigail told me I looked fine and Jaylen agreed. Then they all followed what they were doing.

My aunt asked me to set the table. We had dinner and had a short chat about anything in particular. After dinner, my aunt asked me to come so she could look at me. She told me I looked very

good. She cut and combed my hair in a more feminine style.

With my new hairstyle, I looked very feminine and I could easily be Abigail's younger sister. On our way to bed, my aunt gave me a robe to wear and some cream to rub in the morning before I shower to tidy up any unwanted hair.

In the morning I put on the cream, took a shower, and put on the clothes I was wearing the day before. Abigail came to my room and helped me style my hair and put the least amount of natural color makeup on. Looking in the mirror, I could see this very beautiful girl

looking at me again and starting to feel very excited again.

From my experience dressing up girls, I had a pretty good idea of how to act and I was adjusting quickly. I heard Aunt Joan call us for breakfast so I went, relaxing more than the day before and feeling very feminine.

My aunt told me that I looked very beautiful and convincing when I was a girl. We decided to have a girl's name in case someone heard us. Abigail suggested Julie and I agreed I liked it. We finished breakfast, and then my aunt put more clothes on for me so I could have a chance. She suggested we go for a walk.

I wasn't sure if I was ready to go out, but everyone convinced me I'd be okay. I definitely wouldn't be remotely prominent anyway with everyone wearing the full skirt dresses that were fashionable at the time. It was wonderful to walk through the pastures with my dress skirt cleaning against me and the light breeze blowing in our skirts. A bigger wind blew over all of our skirts, revealing our petticoats and panties. How exciting it was. We were all enjoying this beautiful day and being very feminine.

We walked along the creek farther than we thought. We were now at the next property. So shocked, we met

another guy - a 15-year-old boy named Lance. He knew my cousins and my aunt, and I made him known as Julie. I was afraid that he would know I was a boy, but I was so excited that someone else might see me dressed.

To my surprise and pleasure, he kissed me as a girl and seemed very interested in me. We all sat on the bank of the river and talked. Lance had positioned himself on the bank below us where if we wanted him he could have a good view under our skirts. We all enjoyed giving him what seemed to be occasional yet totally intentional glimpses of our panties and even our skirts. Lance was very

excited even though he didn't realize we noticed it.

We were enjoying teasing Lance but it was too late, so we said goodbye and promised to meet tomorrow. We walked up the bank and watched Lance until we went to the trees. Abigail made an excuse that she had forgotten something by the river, so she asked me to come back with her to get it.

We hid among the trees and saw that Lance was still at the river's edge. He looked around and thought he was alone. He took off his jeans and underwear and was definitely enjoying himself. He was so excited, and Abigail and I were excited to

watch it. Abigail slipped her hand under her skirt. I couldn't see much but she was enjoying herself and she wasn't even concerned about watching her. Abigail straightened herself and said we'd better go. I was so shocked.

We went home, had dinner, and went to bed. I took the opportunity to be alone in bed to relieve the stress built up from the fun of the day. The silk nightgown on my body is the trick.

In the morning I took a shower and put on a lace-padded bra and panties, a white petticoat, and a faded dress. The dress was soft and the petticoat was making the skirt fluffy while I was

walking. Aunt Joan praised me for how I looked. I got the idea that she was enjoying dressing and behaving like a girl. I was enjoying it too - for the first time I was feeling complete.

And Abigail, and she sat outside under the trees and talked about clothes, boys and practice, and about seeing Lance pull himself out.

While I still considered myself a boy, the way I dressed and acted made it all seem so natural. Abigail told us how she was sitting in the front seat of the bus because she knew the boys behind her could see under the skirt of her jacket in the mirror. I enjoyed the idea of all the

boys looking seriously at her. She also liked to bend a little more than she did, which bothers the boys.

My aunt and cousins decided to go to town, but despite the protests, I decided I wasn't ready yet to let others see me. After they left I went for a walk and ran towards Lance. At first, I was a little unsure, but after realizing he was convinced I was a girl I decided to have some fun.

It was still a bit windy, so my skirt was blown up to reveal my panties and panties. I could see that I had his attention, so I faked it. I sat on the bank and knew he could see my skirt. Then we

went for a walk. He was holding my hand and helping me go down some rocks. After taking some advice from Abigail, I was able to make sure Lance could get a lot of good views under my skirt, and it was clear all of that had the desired effect. Lance was running - oddly enough, I did.

Over the next rock, my body gently slid down on Lance. He held me for a moment and then put my lips on his face and kissed him. He was very shy and surprised but enjoyed it. We sat on the lawn and kissed again. His shyness succumbed to his passion and awkwardly took his hand under my skirt and around

my ass. I put his hand in the back of my panties and I was very excited but I had to stop him before finding out. I grabbed his hand and said it was that time of the month. He nervously pulled away. So I reassured him that I could still kiss him and make him feel good. Twenty minutes passed and we were talking and cuddling. I had to go back until we fixed ourselves, kissed, and parted.

On the way back up the hill, I ran into Abigail in the bushes. You watched everything. I grabbed my hand and kissed it on our sapphire lips. We put our legs crossed on the floor and our hands touched under our skirts. Then I took off

my underwear and put on my skirt and my skirt. How cute it felt like she was touching me. Everything was too much. We smoothed our skirts and came home to dinner with our secrets.

The next day we seemed to continue as if nothing had happened. I wore a soft white cotton blouse, a full navy blue skirt, and a white petticoat. I did my makeup and hair. I was training really well with my hair and makeup and I was looking better. The makeup was very natural and wasn't too much for a girl my age.

At breakfast, my aunt announced that we would go to the village to buy

some groceries. She added that she regrets the lack of clothing stores in what was just a village. I was happy about it but I never let it go. My aunt commented that I am happy to be wearing girls' clothes now and said that they are not so bad. I tried not to sound too enthusiastic.

I wasn't sure about going to town, but I knew I wouldn't be able to get out of it this time. We all drove into town in pretty dresses and skirts. I was full of excitement and fear of someone else seeing me. My cousins told me I wouldn't have any trouble passing by for a girl and not to worry.

In town, we walked from one store to another. I was introduced as Julie and no one seems to question my being a girl. How exciting it was. Most people thought I was the most attractive. What a pleasure. Abigail and I spent the morning flirting with the boys and when the same opportunity arose to lean over the counters causing our skirts to pull out and give the boys a good look at our panties. It's amazing how fun it is to tease men and boys.

Back at the farm, we had lunch and then went for a walk. It was a lovely sunny day walking through the meadows. There was a gentle breeze blowing with

some storms that would blow up the inner skirts and jackets. The cool breeze was swirling under our skirts. I wondered if other people were enjoying everything as much as I did. It was way too late when we got back from our walk so we had dinner early and went to bed. The next morning was a bit cold so after putting on my panties and bra, I put on a warm full red shirt and skirt.

Then, I put on a creamy sweater and reached my waist. At breakfast that morning, I saw the others wearing pretty much the same clothes - I was glad I was learning to be a girl because I really enjoyed her. After breakfast, my aunt had

to visit someone so she brought us to the beach to play. It was too cold to swim today, but we had a lot of fun playing in the jungle in the dunes. On the way, we grabbed each other's boobs and flipped each other's skirts a lot to spark some teenage boys at the beach.

How exciting it all was. We used to play in the rocks on the beach and have a great time feeling feminine. We walked along hugging each other and wearing our skirts. it was a great day. After a few hours of gaming, we saw a person, which was Lance.

Lance came in and we talked for a moment and flirted with him as he

accidentally flipped our skirts over and made sure it was turned on. Abigail enjoyed the flirt and I was enjoying it too. Poor Lance had to put up with our harassment for the next hour. Then again he might have been enjoying it, too. I definitely enjoyed being a girl.

What a vacation it turned out that this was and we still have three weeks to go ... yeah I do. I have a boy and 3 girls. I started them to go commando with potty training.

The boy was never wearing underwear. Girls I only wore panties sometimes when I was taking them

somewhere when they were little with a dress or skirt.

They would take them off as soon as I left them most of the time on my way home. For school, I always wore pants or shorts until they were older. I used to wear the old dresses on the girls most of the time at home to play them both. Now the two older girls are 13 and 15 years old and mostly wear jeans or shorts.

They both have one thing each because they want them to be the only underwear in the house. Choose them. They only wear them about 2 times. The boy is 11 years old and is without socks

most of the time even in winter. The youngest girl is 10 years old. Girls are 100% without socks.

Just like my mom.

I would buy them socks and underwear if they wanted and wear them. They don't want anything. I remember when our daughter Jaylynn was 15 years old and she is free to choose whether and when she wants to wear underwear. I haven't worn panties for a couple of days after I gave birth to her and was completely panty-free until delivery. You always grew up with me to be a

commando and accept that as a normal thing.

Yes, I'll let my kids wear underwear if they want to. And they tell them it is perfectly okay to do so, and I will teach them proper hygiene to peek and pee so that their pants don't have any signs of slipping. And I would tell them not to be shy about telling their friends that they are without underwear. I suppose you could say we raised our two girls that way. We never sat them down and told them, "now girls, panties are bad" but since we don't wear them ourselves we just never went out of our

way to buy any. Of course, grandparents would buy cute clothes for them, including panties with Strawberry Shortcake or Care Bears on them, which we told them they could wear if they wanted to. They all got worn, probably about once for the cuteness and novelty of it, then back in the drawer.

Yet as a mother, I also remember a young teen Jaylnn that was standing in a white dress next to her teen young wife also in the same matching dress.

Part: 2

I- Naddalin stare at her, repeat her words in my head, and I can barely

believe what I just heard now seeing her in our world for the first time.

'How exactly do you plan to do that?' I am transformed. Seriously. In a century of your life, have you ever had a real job? But even though I'm dead sad and not kidding at all, she turns her head back and laughs just as I was. I am mocked for doing justice.

Ultimately she calms down enough to say, 'Do you reliably believe that no one will hire me?'

I could get a job if I wanted to, but, back home, how - and when could I - you work in a town that you don't think of yourself then they are, and in every way you can think of, children who work with

nothing like you and their parent who became your boss now thinks you are a waste of life; So get a job - yeah. That is why you're dead. And was long before now.

She shakes her head and laughs more. Forever, please. Don't you think I've been around long enough to improve some skills?

~*~

All this started to reply, and I want to make it clear that while really wonderful watch painted, better than Picasso one hand while at the same time excel on Van Gogh in the hand like a machining- spluttering blood like paints in a crazed young woman's head, I see all

the murdering... of freedom in life, and a world that was becoming less free every day.

Do not really think that it helped her to get the post Barista- desired It's in Starbucks in the sucking my thumb in the corner, and yet something about girls will never change, just like every girl has that boy who is her bitch, and she realized that I own that moment and she has it now... so- oh um!

However, before I said that, Naddalin was she stands beside me- Haven, and she moves with such speed and grace, all I can do is, 'Well, for someone who turns her back on her gifts, she's still moving so fast, for a girl who

doesn't do that what I did, I don't want to see more of her past even if it appears in my painting with in this castle walls like a chapel.

As so-o as if feeling the same as familiar in being the one under given acupuncture, with a warm wonderful flowing and swimming is the case inside my skin is slipping in my arms and around my waist and glass from the chana closet to her chest in the feelings so strongly, and dodges carefully on contact skin of the skin, however, cannot help by feel rattled, I feel everything that Haven did in her death, remembered now for all like us here to keep even if dark to all that

understand why we all get the movement she was fighting for.

-And-

'In addition, what about telepathy?' Ripping myself out of the moment.

I myself cannot even do that, Hum.

Thinking- your brain spends about 70% of its time recreating memories and creating scenarios for ideal moments. This is why I am me, Nevaeh as Naddalin and Karly when need be.

Waiting - like drawing - is sometimes associated with depression - and it comes into the picture.

Outside the wind was tearing down trees, ravaging our castle. The storm was

piling up, so dark that you couldn't see much after the front porch. However, my eyes strained, looking for the source of the sounds that attacked my ear. Loud laughs and cries pierced the night, causing chills on my skin.

The time you spend waiting for something that may never happen is mentally distressing.

The best feeling in the world is knowing that you mean something to someone. This can literally add years to your life. Sometimes good people make bad choices. This does not mean that they are evil, it means that they are human.

However, we were not human that were always under the control of someone

using them like a robot. Then he started talking- 'Are you planning to give that up too - for your home?'

Then my world became dark, and they closed the barrier between my room and their world.

I had no idea how long it had passed it could have been minutes or hours. I felt like forever I didn't know any sound, no vision.

All I could do was wait and then eventually someone came. At first, all I could see was a light flash of light when the barrier was opened.

Then silent voices and steps. What seemed like scraping as my room door was forced open.

I- Haven looked up and into the eyes of a woman I've never seen before. Yet I know where I was by the story I read as a child and that is why I am here. Therefore, after getting over it by its juxtaposition, I can barely take out the words.

'I have no plans to give up on anything that brings me closer to you,' she says, staring at me, steadfast and steadfast.

My mind drifts back in time in the mind of now being Nevaeh... remembering going to the Victoria Falls

on the border of Zimbabwe and Zambia, I recall taking the Safari Train, Safari Train that runs purely in Zimbabwe.

All of this is like my time machine and my teachers make $300,000 in five years, and I am just supposed to be held back, as they drop them. Pants to a party of pissing on me without the courtesy of calling, it down poring raining down on me this is the time machine that takes me back and makes me forget? That was good and dwell on the pain of the past, which is replacing all, the better moments but the worst moments in time.

'As for the rest of that moment,' she Nevaeh shrugs, glancing around the large space before she finds me again.

And tell me, what matters most, never - never? The size of my home or the size of my heart?

I bite my lips and avoid my gaze, the fact of her words makes me feel upset and ashamed - like sex for the first time - when she's 13, and I can now agree.

I swallow hard, focus on whatever else, rethink my life and all my memories come to life.

It's not that I care about her past, I mean, if I want to have this stuff, I'll wipe it myself. Usually, an immediate change

in mood from happiness to sadness indicates that you are missing someone, I noticed it ...

Yet again although it is not important - there are such - just - missed moments in time, if I were to honestly lose it, I have to admit that they were part of the initial attraction - adding to her elegant, shiny, mysterious personality, which instantly attracted me. Then when I finally stand before her again, standing before me, stripped of all the usual dazzle and flash, sharpening her to the essence of who she is, I realize that she is still the same, the warm and wonderful girl that she has been.

Which proves her point more. None of those other things matter. None of that has anything to do with her spirit whatsoever.

I smile, I suddenly remember the only place we could be together safe and protected from harm.

I sought to reach her gloved hand while holding it in mine, saying, 'Come on, I want to show you something,' and pulled it out.

At first, she worried that she would refuse to visit a place that not only requires a certain amount of magic to enter, but that is nothing but magic once you arrive.

Previously, after landing in this vast, sweet-smelling field, she wiped the back of her jeans and offered her hand, staring everywhere as she says, 'Wow, I don't think I've ever managed to make the gate like that so quickly.'

'Please, you who taught me.' I smile, staring at a meadow of pulsating flowers and shivering trees, indicating how everything here is reduced to the purest form of beauty and energy.

I tilt my head back, closing my eyes to the warm, hazy glow you make with me in the shimmering mist of the day.

I remember the last time I was here, how I danced with Naddalin

appearing in the same field, delaying the moment I had to leave.

~ * ~

'So, are you okay to be here?' I ask, not sure how widespread the ban on magic is. I'm not crazy? ' I want to make sure it's comfortable!

Then she shook her head and took my hand.

'I've never tired of seeing this world in its colors and unbelievable creatures.'

It is a display of beauty and potential in its pure form. We make our way through pastures, supported by the grass just below our feet while our fingers graze on the tops of flowers. The golden

wilderness that bends and sways beside us.

Knowing anything is possible in this wonderful place, anything at all, including - maybe - us.

'I missed ... everything ...'

she said, staring everywhere ... I remember,

` No the last few weeks without it, even so, it looks like it's been a long time since the last time we were here - just like that.'

I said, ' It felt weird to come without you, ' leading her towards a beautiful, well-balanced bathroom next to the shaded table. In blue and green.

Even though I have fully discovered another side, I can't wait to show you. Only later - not now. I pushed the guns America pink fabric aside and fell on the soft white pillows, smiling as Nadalin fell right next to me, and we were lying side by side. Side by side, we gaze at the ornately carved coconut beams.

Head together The soles of our feet are just a few inches shy - the result of a growth spurt fueled by elixirs.

'What is the…?'

Turns over on her side ...

Then I approach the curtains with my mind to me and her side. We are keen

to exclude all of those surroundings from her and I, so we can enjoy our own space.

I saw one on the cover of a travel magazine featuring some exotic resorts, and I loved it so much that I thought I'd show it. You know, so we can hang around and stuff.

I block my eyesight, my heart rate, my face flushed, and I know that I am probably the most pitiful seductress I have met in a hundred years.

However, she was just laughing, and she pulled me so close that we almost touched her.

Separated by only a thin blanket of sparkling energy, a pulsating screen

hovers between us - allowing us to get close without harming each other.

I close my eyes, succumbing to the wave of warmth and tingling as our bodies gather. Two hearts pumping in perfect harmony, reaching and retreating, widening and retreating, the rhythm is perfectly synchronized as if it were beating as one.

Everything about it feels so good and so natural so I'm getting closer. My face nests in the hollow where her shoulder meets her neck, longing to savor her sweet skin and inhale her warm aromatic scent.

A low moan escapes from the depths of her throat as I close my eyes

and press her hips, tilting my tongue toward her skin, only to make her spring out of my reach so quickly that I meet the touch of the pillow.

She pushed upright, seeing her move so fast that it turned blurry. He only stops when she is safely hiding on the other side of the curtain, her eyes are on fire, her body is trembling, and I beg her to tell me what happened.

I approached her, wanting to help.

But again, as soon as I get close to her, she moves, and yet, once again holding her hand, the note wakes me away.

She says, 'Don't touch me.' Please, stay where you are. Don't get close.

'But why?'

‘Why is a question.’

My voice is hoarse, uneven, my hands are trembling at my side as if I can feel my old ways and my old life - as it was when I got older - I am no longer a little girl.

Did you do something wrong?

I thought well - given that we're here - and since nothing bad could happen - I thought it'd be okay - if we might try - to relive some kind of reconciliation.

'Never - it's not like that - she -' she shakes her head, her eyes are darker than I've ever seen - for being sky blue.

So the iris is very dark, indistinguishable from the pupils, and blends inward. 'And who said nothing bad could happen here?' Her tone is extremely irritable, the look is so harsh, and she's come a very long way from her usual state of impeccable calm.

I swallow so hard and stare at the floor, feeling stupid with my girlfriend, I risked her life - if they were if they ... - and the silliness to think too miserable for me to do - they know -and that I was guessing - I just assumed...'

I'm sorry.'

My voice is fading, and I know very well what happens when one assumes. I do not know what to say.' Not only are you making me and you lately, but in this case, you may end up dying one last time with no more lives given to you.

I guess - I didn't think about it very well and then shook my head, realizing that it was inadequate given the life and death circumstances that we are in.

I mean, if we're not safe here, where? I pull my shoulder in, and wrap my arms around my waist, trying to make myself smaller, so I'll fade out of her sight.

However, I can't help but wonder specifically what kind of bad thing can

happen in a place where magic comes so easily, and wounds heal instantly.

Looked at Naddalin too, responding to an idea that spins in my head when she says, 'school has the possibility of everything. So far, we saw only light, but who will say that there is no dark? Besides, maybe this is not what we believe at all.

Looked at her, I remember when I first met Javion Wren and how they said something similar. I watch her showing a beautifully carved wooden bench, then gestures for me to sit down. 'Come,' she nodded, she urged me as I took a seat at the far end, and she didn't want to get too close. And risk releasing it again.

There is something you need to see - something you need to understand. So please just close your eyes and clear your mind of any random thoughts and clutter as much as possible. Keep yourself open and receptive to any insights I send. Can you do that? '

Nodded my head ... closed my eyes ...

I do my best to have my mind ideas swept like - what goes in my mind, and I thought more reflection? Is she angry at me - or just angry?

Without a doubt, she angry me - I know it!

How can I be so stupid? But how crazy is she? Can she change her mind and start over? My usual paranoid playlist is set to repeat.

Always But even after wiping it and waiting for what seems to be a reasonable amount of time, all I got until now is a heavy vacuum of black steel thick.

'I do not understand it, ' I said, and I opened my eyes and peered out.

However, they are shaking her head only, her eyes closed tightly, and eyebrows merged into focus, a focus bares all its strength.

Says: 'Hear' then and there.

'And look deep inside.'

Just close your eyes and get it.'

I took a deep breath and tried again, but even so, all I get is an alarming silence and a feeling of black emptiness.

I'm sorry, me. Realized, I don't want to bother her but I'm sure I'm missing the point.

'I don't get much of anything other than silence and darkness.' She whispers 'sincerely,' unperturbed by you. Lamy. 'Now please, hold my hand and go deeper, go beyond the surface with all of your senses, then tell me what you see.'

I take a deep breath and do what she tells me to do, reach out to hers, and go past the solid, dark wall.

...But all I get is the same.

Hanging - I plunged.

Um while waiting - I had a black hole, its limbs rolling, unable to stop or slow down. Freefall in the dark, my terrible voice screams out in one voice.

And just as I'm sure the fall is endless, so it stops. Yelp. the fall. everything.

Everything ... he leaves me hanging there, then let loose, and suspended. Completely alone in a secluded place, with no beginning or end.

Lost in the dark and gloomy abyss with no trace of light coming. Desolate in the infinite void, a lost and lonely world of

eternal midnight. The terrifying understanding slowly seemed to me - this is where I live now.

Hell without escape ...!

-Then-

I try to run, scream and cry for help - but it's no use.

I am frozen, paralyzed, unable to speak completely on my own about all the infinities.

Frankly out of everything I know and I like to cut out from everything that exists.

Knowing that I have no choice but to give up because my mind is empty and my body is limp.

There is no point in fighting when no one can save me.

Kept that way, lonely, eternal, mysterious consciousness creeping into me, pulling from a place out of reach'-to-hanging-out - I took that hell into Nadalin's arms, relieved to see her beautiful, anxious face hovering over me.

'I'm so sorry - I thought I lost you - I thought you'd never come back!' She screamed, grabbed me tight, like a sigh in my ear.

I cling to her, my body trembling, her art races, her clothes drenched in sweat. I've never felt so isolated before - even disconnected - from everything. From every living thing. I hugged her

tightly, unwilling to let go of her, my mind reached out to her, and he asked me why she chose to put me into it.

She turns away, puts my face in her hands as her eyes search for mine. 'I'm sorry. I wasn't trying to punish you or hurt you in any way. I just wanted to show you something, something that you needed to experience first-hand to understand.

I nodded, I can't trust my voice. I was still shaken by the horrific experience so much that it felt like my soul died.

'My Lord!' Her eyes widened. 'This is! This is exactly what it is. The soul is no longer there!

I don't understand, says, a hoarse, shaky voice. 'What is this terrible place?'

I looked away, her fingers squeezing my fingers when she said, 'The future, the eternal abyss that I thought was only for me - which I wish was only for me...' She closes her eyes and shakes her head. But now I know better. Now I know that if you weren't careful, you'd go there too.

I looked at her, began to speak, but she cut me off before I could even reach for the words. 'In the past few days I've been getting these flashy glimpses, really different moments from the past - far and near.' She looks at me, looking carefully at me.

'But the moment we came here-' her signals were around. It started flowing again, slowly at first until everything came to light, including the moments when I was under Magdalene's control.

I also felt relieved of my death. Those short moments after I pierced the circuit before the antidote drunk me, you know, I was dying. I watched my whole life flash before me, hundreds of years of vanity, narcissism, selfishness, and unchecked greed.

Like an endless reel of all my actions, every mistake I made was accompanied by the effect it had - the mental and physical impact of my mistreatment of others.

And while there is some decent work here and there, the majority, well, have reached centuries of my focus on nothing but my goodness, with little thought given to anything or anyone else. Focus only on the physical world at the expense of the spiritual. Not leaving me any doubt that I was right the whole time, my karma is responsible for what we're going through now.

She shakes her head and meets my gaze with such unshakable sincerity and I want to reach out to her, hold her and tell her everything will be fine. Instead, I stayed put, sensing that there was more and it was about to get worse.

Then, now that I'm dead, instead of coming here - her voice cuts out but she forces herself to keep going. I went to the exact opposite place.

A very dark and cold place like home that I wanted it to be or thought it could be. Suffering from the same thing you just did. Solitary, suspended, lonely to stay that way forever. You look at me and want to understand. It was just how it felt. It was as if I was a loner without a soul and unconnected to anything or anyone else.

Staring in her eyes, an ominous shiver covered my skin, I had never seen her so tired, so exhausted, so sad before.

'And now I understand the same thing that escaped from me all these years -' I pull my knee to my chest, protecting myself from everything that comes next.

'Only our physical bodies are immortal. Our souls certainly are not.

I avoid my sight, unable to look at, unable to breathe.

'The future she faces. What I gave you, God forbid, anything should happen, that is it.

My fingers instinctively fly down my throat, and I remember what Naddalin had to say about the piercing chakras, my lack of discrimination and vulnerability,

and wondering if there was some way to protect it. 'But how can you be sure?' I look at her as if she was stuck in a dream, a terrifying and inevitable nightmare.

I mean, there's a good chance you were wrong because it happened too quickly. So this was only a temporary condition. You know, just as I brought you back to life very quickly, you don't have time to make the journey here.

She shakes her head, and her looks meet mine when she says, 'Tell me, whatever did you see when she died? How did you spend those few moments between the time your soul left your body and brought you back to life?

I swallowed hard and looked away, staring at the trees, the flowers, the clear stream gushing nearby, and I remember that day finding myself in the same field.

So, given its strong scent, its shimmering mist, and the all-around feeling of unconditional love, I felt tempted to stay forever, never wanting to leave.

The reason you don't see the abyss is that you are still human. She died a fatal death. However, the moment you drank the elixir and gave you an unlimited life, everything changed. Instead of eternity at school or the place behind a bridge - Shadow worlds become your destiny.

She shakes her head and looks away, overwhelmed with her world of regret and I'm afraid not to get to her again. But just as quickly as her eyes meet when she says, 'We can never live in the plane of Earth, you and I are together. But if something happens, if one of us dies - she shakes her head.' The abyss is where we are going, and we will never see each other once. Others. '

I began to speak, desperate to refute it, tell her that this is wrong, but I cannot. No use. All I have to do is look into her eyes to see the truth.

-And-

As much as I believe in the magic of the powerful evangelization of the place -

just look at the way my memory preached - 'She shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

I cannot bear to surrender, no matter how safe my desire seems to you. It is a great risk. Besides we do not have immunity, it will be different here than what is on the ground. It is a gamble that I cannot bear. Not when I need to do everything I can to keep you.

And safe 'Keep me harmless?' I yawn hard. You who need to save! It's my fault everything happened in the first place! If I don't - 'Always, please,' she says in a raspy voice, 'And you want to listen.

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You can't possibly blame. When I think about the way I lived - the things I

did - 'it shakes Her heart. I don't deserve something better, and if there's any question about blaming my karma, well, I guess it ends here.

I have spent the greater part of a hundred years dedicating myself to physical pleasure and spiritual neglect - and this is the result - the wake-up call, and inappropriately, I have dragged you.

So make no mistake, what concerns me is only you and you. You are my only priority. My life matters only because I stay well long enough to protect you from Naddalin and anyone else who might harm her. And that means we can never be together. never. It is a risk we cannot take.

I turned towards the stream, thousands of thoughts poking my mind. On top of that, even though I heard everything she just said, even though I've groomed the throttle for myself, I still haven't changed who I am right now.

'And the other orphans?'

I whispered, and I remember getting back seven, including two porters, at one point. What happened to them? Do you know if they've turned into villains like Lily and Haven?

Nadine shrugs get up from the bench and walks in front of me. I always assumed that they were old and weak to the point that they did not pose a threat.

This is what happens in the first hundred years - your life - some are slower than the rest. The only way to reverse the process is to drink the tonic again if you like and finish it.

I think Haven collected it while we were dating and sent it to Nadine who eventually learned how to make it and then passed it onto the next one. Then she shook her head more.

This is where Haven is now, 'I complain, and I get over it with regret when I realize the truth. No matter how evil she is, she does not deserve it. Nobody does. I sent it here - and it is now - 'I shook my head, unable to finish.

'You know them?' Turned her on, surprised.

I squeeze my lips together, knowing that I will have to tell her the rest of the story, the parts I wish I had given up.

'It wasn't you who did it, it was me.'

The void fills beside me, sitting very close there is only a sliver of energy beating between us.

'The moment she made her immortal, she determined her destiny.'

I wasn't sure whether she wanted it or not, yet it was the best I thought of it and my intention.

'Just like I did for you.'

I swallow hard, reassured of her warmth along with her desire to reassure me that I'm not responsible for sending my first enemy of all my life straight to that hell.

'I'm so sorry,' she whispered with a look full of regret.

I'm sorry I made you complicated on any of this. I should have left you alone - I should have walked a long time ago. You'd be better off if you had never met me-'

He shook my head, unwilling to even visit this place, it's too late to look back or second guess. 'But if we are meant to be together - that may be our

destiny.' Knowing that she remained unconvinced, the second read her face.

Or maybe you forced something that was never supposed to be. ' She frowns and looks down. 'Have you ever thought of that?'

Look away, bearing in mind the surrounding beauty, knowing words alone can never change any of them, only action can help; And luckily for us, I just know where to start.

I stand, pulling it to my side and I say, 'Come on. We don't need Naddalin - we don't need anyone - I just know the place! 'We head into the countless learning rooms ...

just stopping shy of its steep marble steps as I look at it, wondering (eager!) That she can see what I see - the ever-changing facade required to enter.

She says in a dreaded voice as we watch the group. Roundabout to the holiest and most beautiful place on earth: 'I really found it.' The

Great Pyramids of Giza, the Taj Mahal transformed into the Parthenon, which transforms into the Temple of the Lotus, which becomes and so on. Our mutual recognition of its beauty and wonder allows us to enter the great marble hall lining it with Elaborately carved pillars from ancient Greek times. Things I never thought of living in a small

town were the world to me, but more to them. Naddalin stares around, facing a mask of sheer astonishment as she takes it all in. 'I haven't gone here since then. Now - 'I crave her while holding my breath, to know the details of the last time she was here.

Since I came to find you. 'diverting I am not sure what that means.

Sometimes - she was looking at me. I was lucky enough to have just spoken to you. And I ended up in the same place just in time. Although often I had to wait a few years before it was okay to meet.

'Did you mean you were spying on me?' I miss, hoping it's not as creepy as it sounds. 'when I was a kid?'

She wiggles, avoiding her gaze when she says, 'No, don't spy, never. Excuse me. What do you take from me? ' She laughs and shakes her head. It was like saving tabs.

Wait patiently until the right time. However, the last few times that I couldn't find you, no matter how hard I tried - and believe me, I tried to live like a wanderer, wandering around, sure I lost you forever - I decided to come here. I ran into some friends who showed me the way.

Javion Wren. I nodded, I don't hear or see the answer in her head, but somehow I felt it was true. Overcome the immediate impulse of guilt for failing to

even think of them yet. And I don't even wonder how they might be, and where they might be, until a second ago.

'You know them?' Turned her on, surprised.

I squeeze my lips together, knowing that I will have to tell her the rest of the story, the parts I wish I had given up.

'They led me here too-' I pause for a while, take a deep breath and look away, preferring to take the room over to meet her sexy gaze. They were in Ava - or at least it was Ryan. Javion was outside-' I shook my head and started over.' Cher was trying to help you.'

Then when- I closed my eyes and sighed, and I decided to just show her instead. everything. Entire. Including the parts, I was ashamed to describe in words. Expect the events of that day so that the secrets between us will disappear. Let her know how hard they fought to save her, while I was so stubborn, and refused to listen.

But instead of getting upset as I feared, she puts her hands on my shoulder and stares at me with forgiveness as she thinks, what happened is done. We must move forward, there is no room for retreat.

I swallow hard and catch her gaze, knowing she's right. Time to start, but where do we start?

'It would be better if we separated.' Her gestures, her words were a surprise to my ears, and I'm about to speak when she adds, 'Think about it at all. You're trying to find something to reverse the effects of the elixir that I've drunk, while I'm trying to save you from Shadow worlds, not the same.

I sighed, disappointed but must agree. I think I'll see you again at home afterward. My house, if that's okay? I put my hands on her and squeeze her, hesitating to visit her frustratingly barren room and unsure of where to stand on the

entire curse of karma now that her memory has returned.

As soon as I nodded and closed her eyes, it disappeared from view.

So, I took a deep breath and closed my eyes as well, thinking: I need help. I made a terrible mistake and I don't know what to do. I either need to find an antidote - something that will reverse the effects of what Naddalin did - Or find a way to reach it, and persuade her to cooperate with me - but only in a way that she will not need - um - seriously bargaining for myself in a way that I am not comfortable with ... if you know what I mean...

Focus on my intention, and repeat the words over and over. It grants access to Akashic Records, the perpetual record For everything that has been done, is done, or will be done at all. I pray to God not to close again like the last time I was here.

But by the time I hear that familiar noise, instead of the usual long hallway leading to a mysterious room, I find myself slapped in the middle of a cinema hall, its lobby is empty, and the snack bar is deserted, with no clue what to do until it opens a bunch of double doors. In front of me.

I step into a dark theater with sticky floors, worn seats, and the scent of

buttery popcorn in the air. By pressing the aisle and choosing the best seat in the house, the seat halfway down and the dead center, I push my feet onto the chair right in front of me as the lights turn off and a large tub of popcorn pops up in my lap. Watch the red curtains recede as the large crystal screen begins to flicker and glow in an abundance of images racing fast past the past.

But instead of the solution I was hoping for, all I get is a series of clips from movies that I've already seen. This resulted in a homemade montage of my family's funniest moments, scrolling straight from my old life in Oregon and

revealing an audio track that only Riley could have made.

Part 2:

Watch a clip of Riley and me, we're both banging on a homemade stage in our lair, dancing and lip-synching to an audience consisting of our fathers and our dog. Soon followed by a picture of Buttercup, our sweet yellow lab. Her tongue was straining towards her nose, licking like crazy, trying to reach for a piece of peanut butter, Riley had dabbled there.

And while this wasn't what I had hoped for, I know it matters at all. Riley promised that she would find a way to connect with me, and she assured me that

just because I couldn't see her anymore doesn't mean she was still around.

So, I push my mission aside and sink into my seat. Knowing that she is sitting next to me, silent and invisible. Wanting to share the moment, two sisters share a home movie version of what it was before.

By the time I get back to my room, Naddalin has been waiting, sitting on the edge of my bed, cradling a small satin bag in her gloved palm.

~ * ~

'How long have you gone?' I ask, I go down beside her as I go darker in my bed clock and do my math.

She reminds me of saying, 'There is no time at school.' 'But on the ground plane, I say you left for a while. Did you learn anything?

Think of the home movies I watched, Riley’s version of 'The Family's Funniest Videos', and then shake my head and shrug my shoulder. Nothing helpful. You?'

She smiles, and she hands over the silk bag and she says, 'Open and see.'

I pull the strap, insert a finger inside, and retrieve a black silk wire holding a group of colored crystals that have been tied together by thin golden ribbons. I watch them capture and reflect the light as I hang in front of me,

Believing that they are beautiful if not a little strange.

She says, 'It's magic,' she watches me carefully as I take the individual stones, each bearing a different shape, size, and color.

They have been worn over the ages and are said to possess magical properties to evangelize, protect, thrive, and balance. Even though the person, who is only being created for you, is heavy on the element of protection because that's what you need.

Look at it, I wonder how they could fool around. Then I remember the crystals I used to make the antidote that saved her, and how he would have worked - if

Naddalin hadn't fooled me To add my blood to the mix.

It's unique, assembled, and crafted with your journey in mind. No one else like him, nowhere else. I know it doesn't solve our problem, but at least it will hurt.

Darker in a pack of rocks, not sure what I'll say it is about to slip it off an over my head and try it, when she smiles and says, 'Let me…' I gathered my long hair and wrapped it over my shoulder as she stretched out behind me and secured the little golden clip, before tucking it under my tee where no one could see it.

'Is it a secret?' I ask, expecting the crystals to feel cold and hard against my

skin and astonished to find them quite warm and comforting instead.

~*~

She brushes my hair back over my shoulder, letting it fall just shy of my waist. 'No, it's not a secret. Though you probably shouldn't flaunt it either. I have no idea just how far Naddalin's advanced, so it's better not to draw her attention to it.'

'Her knows about the chakras,' I say, seeing the surprise in her gaze and choosing to omit the fact that she's responsible for that. Having unwittingly revealed all kinds of secrets while under Naddalin's spell. She feels bad enough

already, so there is no reason to make it any worse.

I tap my fingers against the amulet beneath my shirt, surprised by how solid it feels from the outside, compared to the inside, the part that rests on my skin. 'But what about you? Don't you need protection too?' Watching as she unearths a similar amulet from under her long-sleeved tee, smiling as she dangles it before me. 'How come yours looks so different?' I ask, squinting at the cluster of sparkling stones.

'I told you, no two are alike. Just like no two people are alike. I've got my own issues to overcome.'

'You have issues?' I laugh, though seriously wondering what they could be, she is good at everything she does.

-And-

I mean everything.

She shakes her head and laughs, a wonderful sound I do not get to hear nearly enough anymore. 'Believe me, I've got my share,' she says, laughing again.

'And you're sure these will keep us safe?' I press it against my chest, noticing how it feels like a part of me now.

'That's the plan.' She shrugs, getting up from the bed and heading for the door as she adds, 'But, Ever, please

do us both a favor and try not to put it to the test, okay?'

'What about Naddalin?'

I ask, taking in her long, lean form as she rests against the jamb. 'Don't you think we should come up with a plan? Find a way to get her to give us what we need and be done with all the?'

Naddalin looks at me, gaze narrowed on mine. 'There's no plan, NEVER- Ever. Engaging with Naddalin is exactly what she wants. We're better off finding a solution on our own, without relying on her.'

'But how? Everything we've tried so far has been a total bust.'

-And-

I shake my head. 'And why should we run ourselves ragged, searching for answers, when Naddalin's already admitted to having the remedy? She said all I have to do is pay the right price and he'll hand it over-how hard can that be?'

'And you're willing to pay her price?' Naddalin asps, voice steady and deep as her dark eyes sweep mine.

I avert my gaze, cheeks hating to a thousand degrees. 'Of course not! Or at least not the price that you think!' I bring my knees to my chest and wrap my arms around them. 'It's just-' I shake my head, frustrated at having to plead my case. 'It's just that-'

'She wants to divide us, make us question each other, break us apart. She also wants us to go after her and start the war.

'NEVER- Ever, this is exactly what Naddalin wants.' Her jaw tightens, her features harden, before meeting my gaze and softening again.

Then while I promise to do everything in my power to protect you, you must help me- and her too. You've no motive to trust her, she will lie, operate, and make no mistake, it's a very dangerous game that she plays.

You should promise you will stay away from her, ignore all her taunts, and will not rise to her bait. I will find a

solution. Figure something out. Just please, look to me for the answers, not Naddalin, okay?'

I switch my gaze back to her, an idea beginning to form one that might work. I press my lips together and look away, wondering why I should promise any of that when the cure is right there for the taking. Besides, I am the one who caused the situation. I am the one who got us into the mess. So, I should be the one to get us both out. 'So, we're clear about Naddalin?' She tilts her head and lifts her brow, unwilling to leave until I consent.

I nod, just barely, but still enough to convince her to head down the stairs so

fast I cannot distinguish her form. The only hint of her having been here are the stones against my chest and the single red tulip she left on the bed.

Thinking in my head, my prophecies have happened- the country with the flag with the star, remember that, launched rockets of war for our homeland in the USA, makes me glad to be where I am at, and remember the one that has fought and died for us, like Kristen! Now she is out there fighting with them the man and strong woman, yet once more in a new life, as one of us... the USA, it turns on the rest of the world, and they are turning on us. I foresee a day when like all just

become nothing but impressions of just that… imitations!

'NEVER- Ever?'

Since as nice as it is lying beside Naddalin, the beat of our hearts connecting as one, eventually, it is just not enough. It will never- EVER- NEVER- EVER be enough. I want a normal relationship with my immortal boyfriend- NOT A GIRL! As you could think she is missing something is that I need and want- is she not? One with no walls.

Oh, yes boy- and I will pretty much stop at nothing to get it… One where I can truly enjoy the feel of skin as opposed to the way I remember it in my head.

(3 hours later, after sleeping in the same bed in the same room, drooling on one another as we sleep, dur-ta-dur- obviously.)

'Did you eat yet?'

She places her hand on my shoulder as she peers at the screen- I was working on my next part of my life's story- to add to the book- in my own words, hoping my words would stand the test of time like the girls before me, I find my story lackluster and boarding at times- yet it's the story of my life- like theirs.

-And-

Then since- I did not prepare, did not guard myself against her touch, that

is all it takes to see her version of the infamous girls stand before me, I was part of this all, which, unfortunately, is not so different from Milley's version-the two of them acting all happy and giddy, smiling at each other with an abundance of hope, yet still on the inside nothing has changed.

Then even though she seems happy, and no doubt deserves to be happy especially after all that I've put her through, I still comfort myself with the vision I had a few months back- the one where she ends up with some cute boy she used to know- from back home when she goes back in time to relive- days gone by- like me too, always looking for more

in the past than in the here and now-why?

(THE QUESTION IS WHY?)

And now I'm right back where I started. Sober and miserable. I guess by now I should know enough about the loss to realizing that you never really stop missing someone-you just learn to live around the huge gaping hole of their absence. Just like Our past may shape us, but it does not define who we become if only that was tried for us. The only thing a person can ever really do is keep moving forward. Take that big leap forward without hesitation, without once looking back. Simply forget the past and forge toward the future.

I'm egotistic, impatient, and a little unconfident. I make mistakes, I am out of control, and at times hard to grip.

Nevertheless, if you can't grip me at my nastiest, then you sure as hell don't earn me at my finest- wondering if I should say or do something to temper her excitement since it is not like the little flirtation is going anywhere. Nonetheless, knowing I have already taken too big of a risk by outing myself to Milley, I do not say a word. I cannot afford to tip her off too.

I swivel around in my chair, releasing myself from her grip.

Wanting to avoid seeing anything more than I already have, waiting for her energy stream to fade.

'Naddalin made me dinner,' I say, voice steady and low even though it is not exactly true. Unless you count the solution, I drank.

Sher looks at me, gaze suddenly troubled as it narrows on mine. 'Naddalin?' Sher steps back. 'Now there's a name I haven't heard in a while.'

I cringe, wishing I had not just put it out there like that. I should have broken her in slowly, gotten her used to the idea of seeing her again.

'Does this mean you're back together?' 'Yeah, um, we're still-friendly.' Shake my shoulder. 'I mean, actually, we're more than friends, we're more like-' I shrug, allowing my hair to fall in my face so it is partially hidden. Grasping a chunk and twisting it around, pretending to inspect for split ends even though I no longer get them.

Dating and doomed-destined to spend an eternity in the abyss-madly in love but unable to touch- 'Well, yes, I mean, I guess you could say we're back together again.' Forcing a smile so wide my lips practically split down the middle, but holding it anyway, hoping it will encourage her to join in.

'And you're okay with that?'

She runs her hand through her long hair, a shade we used to share the same color until I started drinking the solution which turned mine even lighter- her hers, then perches on the edge of my bed, crosses her legs, and drops her portfolio onto the floor-four very bad signs that she is become peaceful in for one of her long, awkward talks.

Her gaze moves over me, taking in my faded jeans, my white tank top, searching for symptoms, hints, clues, telltale signs of adolescent distress.

Having only recently ruled out anorexia and or bulimia when my solution-fueled growth spurt added four

inches to my height and bulked up my frame with a thin layer of muscle even though I never work out.

But the time it's not my arrival that's got her unnerved, it's my- on-again-off-again- relationship with Naddalin, that is the issue. And even though that may be true, nothing about Naddalin and my relationship could ever be condensed into a chapter in a book. Having recently finished yet another parenting book claiming that a tumultuous relationship is a major cause for concern.

Like she's somehow too old for you-or-' She shrugs, unable to place it. 'Don't get me wrong, Never- Ever, I like Naddalin, I do.

She's nice and polite, and she's certainly very composed-and yet, there's something about that cool self-assurance, something that seems rather odd for a young man her age.

First, it was Haven with the whole telepathy thing, and now Jaylynn taking issue with her maturity and poise.

I push my hair off my face so I can see her better. She's the second person today who's noticed something off about her about us. And even though it's easy enough to explain, the fact that they're even noticing in the first place is what worries me.

'And while- I know there's only a few months between you, she somehow

comes off as-more experienced. Too experienced.' Sheer shrugs. 'And I'd hate for you to feel pressured into doing something you're not quite ready for.'

I press my lips together and try not to laugh, thinking how she could not have gotten it more wrong. If I am the innocent maiden being chased by the big bad wolf, never imagining that I am the predator in the tale, dangerously pursuing my prey to the point of risking her life.

'Since no matter what she may say, you are in control of you, Never- Ever.

You are the one who decides who, where, and when. And no matter how you may feel about her, or any boy for that matter, they have no right to push their

agenda on-' 'It's not like that,' I tell her, cutting in before it gets any more embarrassing than it already has. 'Naddalin's not like that. She's a perfect girl, an ideal girlfriend. Seriously, Jaylynn, you're way off course. Just trust me on the one, okay?'

She looks at me for a moment, brittle orange aura wavering, wanting to believe, unsure if she should.

Then she picks up her bag and heads for the door, stopping just shy of it when she says, 'I was thinking-'

I look at her, tempted to peek at her thoughts, despite my vow to never intentionally breach her privacy like that-

unless it has an emergency of course, which it is not.

'Since school is letting out soon even if were back on Earth as normal looking girls we still have to go to school as if were normal girls of our age, and since I have not heard you mention any summer plans, I thought it might be good for you to find a job, spend a few hours each day working at something.'

'What do you think?'

'What do you think of as normal?'

What do I think…?

I gape, with bugging eyes, mouth dry, at a complete loss for words... I was, well, I think I should have peered into

your head, after all, think over your thoughts more than my own, for the reason that, clearly this does succeed as a major agony call!

'Nothing full time or anything like that. There will be plenty of time for the beach and your friends. I just thought it would be good for you to-'

'Is it about money?'

My mind is reeling, frantic to find a way out…

If it is a simple matter of pitching in for the mortgage and groceries, then I will gladly come up with whatever she needs.

Not even one day. Un-uh. No way, hell, she can even take whatever's left of my parent's life insurance policy for all I care, after all, it did set me for life, after the fact… but what she cannot have is my summer.

'Ever, of course it's not about money- is it not yet that's also life no?' She averts her gaze as her cheeks flush soft pink.

Mysteriously averse to discussing all things economic for someone who makes a living as a nurse, on and off with the Earthing she chooses to be in within her life spans or within her old body too.

'I just thought it might be good for you to, you know, meet some new people, learn something new.

Get out of your usual environment for a few hours each day, and-' And get away from Naddalin.

Not needing to read her thoughts to know what this is really about, now that she knows we're back together she's more strong-minded than ever to break us apart.

Besides, while I get how troubled she was by all the moodiness and despair, I lay open to her when we were apart, the time she got it all wrong.

It is not like she thinks. Though I've no idea how to explain that to her and keep my secrets intact. '-and as it so happens, a summer internship just opened for me, working with her as a LPN, and I'm sure, it's just a matter of speaking with the senior partners, and the job will be mine.' Then she grins, face radiant, eyes bright, expecting me to join the fête as well- when I do it at last.

'But aren't those positions usually reserved for law students?' I ask, sure I'm pathetically underqualified to fill those particular shoes.

But she just shakes her head. 'It's not that type of internship. This is more of a filing and phone answering assignment.

And there is really no money in it either, though you will get school credit and a small end of the season bonus. I just thought it might do you some good. Not to mention how it will really beef up those college applications of yours.' College- yet, another thing I used to obsess about but not anymore.

I mean, what possible use could I have for all those classes and professors when all I must do is place my hand on a book or peek inside my teacher is hard to know all the answers? Cheating is too easy, yet miss honesty wants me to do it the hard way, I question why?

This is something that I have questioned her for years. If you have the

power to take then do so-o, you are not hurting anyone but yourself.

'I'd hate for anyone else to get in there when I know you're just perfect for the job.'

I stare at her, unsure what to say.

'It's a pleasant experience for a person your age,' she adds, her indignant tone a result of my silence.

'It's suggested in all the books. They say it builds charisma, promise, and the chastisement to show up on time and get the job done.'

Great, So, I have Dr. Phil to thank for ruining my summer- I thought.

It is my fault she changed, I am annoyed with Jaylynn until I remember how she was when I first got her calm, tranquil, and completely laid back, allowing me all the space and freedom I needed.

My postponement, my rejection to ingest anything other than the pink solution, and all the drama with Naddalin are what sent her over the edge.

Besides this is where it led to the dreaded summer internship she is bent on securing for me.

But no way can I spend the summer juggling a mountain of files and incessantly ringing phones when I am

going to need all the free time I can get to find an antidote for Naddalin.

And working in Jaylynn's office- within the nursing department within the Rosman building, with her and her colleagues praying over my shoulder, just will not do, sometimes I was just a little school girl still- I miss those days, and I think about and say within my mind not really- am meant to be truly happy?

Though it is not like I can say that outright. It will set off her alarms. I need to play it cool, let her know that while I've nothing against discipline and character building, I prefer to tackle those things on my own.

'I'm totally cool with working,' I say, trying not to press my lips together, fidget, or break eye contact, three definite giveaways that I am not being entirely honest. 'But since you do so much for me already, I'd feel a lot better if I could find my own job. I mean, I am just not sure I am cut out for office work, so maybe I could look around a little. See what my options are. I will even pitch in with the mortgage and food. It's the least I can do.'

'What food?' She laughs, shaking her head at me.

'You barely eat! Besides, I do not want your money, Ever. Though I will help you establish a line of credit if you'd like.'

'Sure.' I shrug, forcing an enthusiasm I do not feel since I do not need such conventional things. 'That would be great!' I add, knowing that the longer I can keep her mind off the internship, the better for me.

'Okay then.' She drums her fingers against the doorjamb as she completes her plan. 'You've got one week to find something on your own.'

I gulp, trying to keep the eye bugging to a minimum. One week? What kind of a head start is that when I don't even know where to begin? I have never had a job before. Is it possible to just manifest one?

'I know it's not much time,' she says, reading my face. 'But I'd hate for them to fill the position when I know you'd be perfect.'

She heads into the hall and closes the door between us, leaving me sideswiped, dumbstruck, staring at the flickering remnants of her orangey aura, her magnetic energy field, hovering insistently in the space where she stood. Thinking how ironic it is that I was just making fun of Naddalin for assuming she could land a job without any experience only to find myself facing the same fate.

I toss and turn all night. Bed a tangled mess of sweat-dampened pillows and blankets, body and mind exhausted

by dreams. Waking briefly, gasping for air, only to be pulled under again, returning to the very same place I fought to escape.

-And-

The only reason- I want it to stop is that Riley is there. Laughing happily as she grabs hold of my hand, taking me on a tour of a very strange land. But even though I skip right alongside her, pretending to enjoy the trip too, the moment she turns her back, I scramble for the surface, eager to remove myself from the scene.

Because the truth is, it is not Riley. Riley is gone. Having crossed the bridge at my urging, moving on to some

unknown place. And even though she keeps yanking me back, yelling at me to pay attention, to just trust her and stop running-I refuse to obey. Sure, that is punishment for harming Naddalin, sending Haven to the Shadow worlds, and putting everything I care about at risk-allowing my subconscious to produce these guilt-induced images, so sugar-coated with happiness, there is no way they are real.

But the last time, just as I am about to run, Riley appears right before me, blocking my exit, and yelling at me to stay put. Standing before a large stage and slowly drawing the drapes, revealing a tall, narrow, rectangular cube-like prison

of glass-containing a desperate and struggling Naddalin inside.

I rush to her aid as Riley looks on, pleading with her to hang in there while I help her break free. But she cannot even hear me. Cannot even see me. Just continues to fight until overcome with exhaustion, with absolute futility, she closes her eyes and fades straight into the abyss.

The home for lost souls.

I bolt from my bed, body shaking, chilled, drenched with sweat, standing in the center of my room with a pillow clutched to my chest. Overcome not only by the feeling of utter defeat but by the horrible message my imagined sister has

sent-telling me that no matter how hard I try, I cannot save my soul mate from me.

I run for my closet, changing into some clothes before grabbing some sneakers and heading for the garage. Knowing it is too early to go to school, too early to go anywhere. But I refuse to give up. Refuse to believe in nightmares. I must start somewhere. Must use what I got.

But just as I am about to climb into my car, I think better. Realizing the entire process of opening the garage door and starting the engine will risk waking Jaylynn. And even though I can easily step outside and manifest another car, bike,

Vespa, or whatever else I might want, I decided to try running instead.

I've never been so hostile before. Far more used to dragging my feet through every forced lap in PE than striving for any sort of personal best. But that was before I became immortal. Before I was bestowed with incredible speed. A speed I have not even begun to test the limits of since the last time I ran was the first time I realized I even had the potential. But now that I am faced with the perfect opportunity to see just how far and fast I can go before stopping, dropping, or crumbling to the ground with a debilitating case of side cramps, I cannot wait to try it out.

I slip out the side door and head for the street. At first thinking, I should warm up, start in a nice slow jog before hitting the asphalt at full throttle. But no sooner have I started than a major surge of adrenaline kicks in, coursing through my body like the highest-grade rocket fuel. And the next thing I know, it is full speed ahead. Running so fast my neighbor's houses are reduced to a visual blur of stucco and stone. Jumping fallen trash cans and dodging poorly parked cars, as I race from street to street with the grace and agility of a jungle cat. Having virtually no awareness of my legs or my feet, just trusting they will not fail me. That they will get me to my destination in miraculous time.

-And-

No more than a few seconds have passed when I am standing before it, the one place I swore I would never return to, prepared to do the one thing I promised Naddalin I am wouldn't-approaching Naddalin's door, hoping to broker deal.

But before I can even raise my hand to knock, Naddalin is there. Clad in a deep purple robe over blue silk pajamas, her matching velvet slippers with embroidered golden foxes peeking out from the herm. Her gaze sleek, narrowed, looking me over without a trace of surprise.

'Ever.' She cocks her head to the side, allowing for an unobstructed view of

her flashing Ouroboros tattoo. 'What brings you to the neighborhood?'

My fingers play at the amulet just under my shirt, heart racing beneath it, hoping Naddalin's right, that it will give the necessary protection-should it come to that.

'We need to talk,' I say, trying not to cringe as her eyes sail over me, enjoying a nice, long, leisurely cruise. Squinting into the night, then back at me. 'Do we?' She lifts her brow. 'And here I had no idea.'

I start to roll my eyes, but remembering my purpose for coming here, I settle for pressing my lips together instead.

'Recognize the door?' She raps her knuckles hard against the wood, eliciting a nice solid thump, as I wonder what she could be up to. 'Of course, you do not,' she says, lips quivering at the sides. 'That's because it's new. I was forced to replace the old one after your last visit. You remember? When you busted your way in so you could toss my supply of elixir down the drain?' She laughs and shakes her head. 'Very naughty of you, Ever. And quite a mess I must say. I hope you'll manage to behave better today.' She leans against the door frame and waves me in, gazing at me in a way so deep, so intimate, it is all I can do not to squirm.

I heard down the hall and into the den, noticing how the door is not the only thing that has changed since I was last here. Gone are the framed Botticelli prints and abundance of chintz, all of it replaced by marble and stone, dark heavy fabrics, rough plastered walls, and black iron things shaped into scrolls.

'Tuscan?' I turn, startled to find her standing so near I can see the individual dark purple flecks in her eyes.

She shrugs, refusing to back up and give me some space. 'Sometimes I get a little hankering for the old country.' She smiles a slow widening of her cheeks, displaying shiny white teeth. 'As you well know, Ever, there's no place like home.'

I swallow hard and turn away, trying to decide my quickest escape since I cannot afford to make even the slightest mistake.

'So, tell me, to what do I owe the magnificent Jewell?' She glances over her shoulder as he hears for the bar. Removing a bottle of elixir from the wine refrigerator and pouring it into a cut crystal glass, before offering it to me. But I just shake my head and wave it away, watching as she carries it over to the couch where she poops herself down, spreads her legs wide, and rests the glass on her knee. 'I'm assuming you didn't drop by in the dead of night to admire my

latest decorating scheme. So, tell me, what's the purpose of the?'

I clear my throat, forcing myself to look her square in the eye without flinching, wavering, fidgeting, or showing any other sign of weakness. Aware of how the whole situation can change in an instant-how easily I can turn from mild curiosity to irresistible prey.

'I'm here to call a truce,' I say, alert for a reaction but getting only her penetrating gaze. 'You know, a cease-fire, a proclamation of peace, a-'

'Please.' She waves her hand. 'Spare me the definition, luv. I can say it in twenty languages and forty dialects. Hey you?'

I shrug, knowing I am lucky to have said it is the one. Watching as she swirls her drink, the iridescent red liquid flashing and sparking as it runs up the sides and splashes back down.

'And just what sort of truce are you after? You of all people should know how it works. I've no intention of giving you anything, unless you're willing to give up something of your own.' She pats the narrow space just beside her, smiling as though I would consider joining her there.

'Why do you do that?' I ask, unable to hold my frustration. 'I mean, you're decent looking, you're immortal, you've got all the gifts that go with it-you can

pretty much have anyone you want, so why do you insist on bothering me?'

She throws her head back and laughs, a giant roar that fills up the room. Finally calming down enough to level her gaze, looking at me as she says, 'Decent looking?' She shakes her head and laughs again, placing her glass on the table and retrieving a pair of golden nail clippers from a jewel-encrusted case.

'Decent looking,' she mutters, shaking her head, taking a moment to check out her nails, before returning her focus to me. 'But you see, Luv, that's just it. I can have anything I want. Anything or anyone.

It all comes so easy. Too easy.' She sighs, getting to work on her nails, so absorbed by the task, I'm wondering if she'll continue when she says, 'It all gets a little tedious after the first-oh-hundred or so years. And while you are far too new to understand any of this, someday you'll realize just how big of a favor I've done you.'

I squinted, having no idea what she could mean. A favor? Is she serious?

'You sure you won't have a seat?' She wags her nail clipper toward the overstuffed chair just to my right, urging me to take it. 'You're making me out to be a very bad host, insisting on standing there like that. Besides, do you have any

idea how fetching you look? A little-bedridden-sure, but in the sexiest way.'

She narrows her eyes until they are sleek as a cat's, lips parting just enough for her tongue to escape. But I just stay put and pretend not to notice. Everything with Naddalin is a game, and taking a seat would be conceding defeat. Though staying like that, being careful to wet her lips as her gaze lingers in all the wrong places, does not feel like much of a win.

'You're even more delusional than I thought if you think you've done me a favor,' I say, voice hoarse, scratchy, a long way from strong. 'You're crazy!' I add, regretting it the instant it is out.

But Naddalin just shrugs, unfazed by my outburst as he returns to her nails. 'Trust me, it's more than just a favor, luv. I have given you a purpose. A raison d'être as they say.' She glances at me, brow raised. 'Tell me, Ever, are you not completely fixated on finding a way to-consummate-with Naddalin? Are you not so desperate for a solution you actually convinced yourself it was a clever idea to come here?'

I swallow hard and stare at her. I should have known better, should have heeded Naddalin's advice.

'You're too impatient.' She nods, smoothing the edges of her freshly clipped nails. 'What's the rush when you

have all of infinity laid out before you? Think about it, Ever, how exactly would you spend your eternity if it were not for me? Showering each other with huge bouquets of bloody red tulips? Having at each other so often it couldn't help but grow boring?'

'It is ridiculous.' I glare. 'And the fact that you see it like the-like it is some chivalrous deed that you've done-' I shake my head, knowing there is no need to continue. She is delusional, insane, figured out to see things in her selfish way.

'Hundred years within my body and others- it all the same, I yearned for her,'

she says, tossing her nail clippers aside, gaze never once leaving mine.

'And why, you ask?

Why would I bother with the same woman for so long when I can have anyone?' She looks at me as though waiting for the answer, but we both know I've no intention of going there.

'It wasn't just her beauty like you think-though I will admit, it did spur things at the start.' Her smiles, eyes reminiscent. 'No, it was the simple fact that I couldn't have her. No matter how hard I tried, no matter how long I pined, I was never allowed'-her looks at me, gaze heavy, intense-'admittance-if you will.'

I turn my eyes. I cannot help it. The fact that she wasted centuries pining for that monster is of no interest to me.

But she just continues, ignoring my pained expression when she says, 'Make no mistake, Ever, I am about to share something very important, something you really should keep in mind.' She leans forward, arms on knees, voice steady and low, filled with new urgency. 'We always want what we can't have.' She leans back, nodding as though she just shared the key to enlightenment. 'It's human nature. We're the same. And as much as you would prefer not to believe it, it's the only reason Naddalin's spent the last four hundred years longing for you.'

I look at her, face placid, body still, aware that she is trying to hurt me, prodding the usual spots, knowing this has been one of my fears from the moment I first learned of our history.

'Face, it, Ever, even Haven's incredible beauty wasn't enough to keep her interested. I'm sure you're aware of just how quickly she got tired of her?'

I swallow hard, stomach like a hard-bitter marble. Since when is two hundred years considered quickly? But I guess when you are dealing with eternity everything is relative.

'It's not a beauty contest,' I say, cringing when I hear the words spoken

aloud. I mean, seriously, is that the best I could do?

'Of course, it is not, luv.' Naddalin shakes her head, pity in her gaze. 'If it was, Haven would win.' Her back settles, arms spread across the cushions, glass resting on top, daring me to respond. 'Let me guess, you've convinced yourself it's about two souls meeting as one, destined for each other, and all of that-puppy love?' She laughs, nodding when she adds, 'That is what you're thinking, right?'

'You don't want to know what I'm thinking.' I narrowed my gaze, decided to get to the point now that my patience's dissolved. 'I didn't come here to be bored

by your philosophical litanies, I came here because.'

'Because you want something from me.' She nods, setting down her drink, glass meeting wood with a solid, wet thwomp. 'In which case, I am in the driver's seat, which means you're in no position to set the pace.'

'Why do you do that?' I shake my head, having grown bored with the game. 'Why do you bother where you know I'm not interested? Surely you realize that no matter what you do to Naddalin and me, it will never bring Haven back. What happened. It can never be changed. And, in the end, all the game playing, all of the nonsense you engage in-all it really does

is prevent you from living your life-from moving on.' I continue to stare, gaze unwavering, convincing. Projecting an image of her handing over the antidote and cooperating with me. 'So, I am asking you, in as reasonable a way as I can-please help me undo what you have done to Naddalin, so we can all coexist.'

She shakes her head, lids squinted tight. 'Sorry, darlin', the price is set. Now it's just a matter of whether you're willing to pay.'

I lean against the wall, tired, defeated, but not letting on. Knowing the one thing she wants is the one thing I will never give. The same old game Naddalin

warned me about. 'You'll never have me, Naddalin. Never, ever, for as long as I-'

Not even getting to the more degrading, insulting part that comes next when she rises from the couch, moving so quickly her breath hits my cheek long before I can blink.

'Relax,' her whispers, face looming so close I can make out each flawless pore on her skin. 'As much fun as that might be, giving an amusing diversion at least, I'm afraid that's not it. I am after something far more esoteric than a virginal shag. Though, if you would like to make a go of it, no strings attached, then I assure you, darlin', I'm certainly up for the task.' Her smiles, deep blue eyes

boring into mine, projecting the movie her plays in her head, the one starring her, and me, and a king-sized bed.

I look away, breath coming ragged, too fast, summoning every ounce of my will not to slam my knee in her groin when her nose glances my ear, my cheek, my neck, inhaling my scent.

'I know what you're going through, Ever,' she murmurs, lips brushing the tip of my ear. 'Longing for something so close and yet-you can never quite taste it. It is the kind of pain most people will never experience. But we know, don't we? You and I are joined in that way.'

I relax my fists and fight to steady myself. Knowing I cannot risk doing anything rash, cannot afford to overreact.

'Not to worry, she said.'

She smiles at me, slipping just out of my reach.

'You're a nifty girl.

I am sure you will figure it out.

And if not-' Her shrugs. 'Well, nothing changes, right? Everything stays the same. You and I with our fates intertwined-for all of infinity.'

She slips down the hall, moving so fast it is a moment before I can make out her form. Tilting her head and urging me toward the door, practically pushing me

onto her stoop when she says, 'Sorry to cut it so short. Though I do so with your reputation in mind. If Naddalin ever found out you were here-well, that could be rather tragic for you, couldn't it?'

Her smiles, all shiny white teeth, golden hair, tanned skin, and blue eyes-the ultimate California poster boy beckoning-Come live the good life in Laguna Beach! And I am furious with myself-furious for being so stupid for not listening to Naddalin-for putting us further at risk. Handing Naddalin yet one more thing to lord over my head.

'Sorry you didn't get what you came for, Luv,' she purrs, her attention pulled by a vintage black Jaguar that pulls into

the drive, having a gorgeous dark-haired couple who had it right inside. Closing the door behind them as she adds, 'Whatever you do, avoid Marco's car on your way out, she'll flip if you so much as smudge it.'

I walk home. Or at least, that is the direction I originally heard in. But somewhere along the way, I take a turn. Then another. And another. My feet move so slowly they practically drag, knowing there is no need to run, nothing to prove. Despite my strength and speed, I am no match for Naddalin. She is the expert of the game and I am merely her pawn.

I continue, deep into the heart of Laguna, or the Village, as it is called. Too

awake to go home, too ashamed to see Naddalin, making my way through the dark, empty streets until stopping before a small, well-tended cottage, with flowering plants flanking either side of the door and a woven welcome mat placed just so, making it appear warm, friendly, completely benign.

Only it is not. Not even close. Now it is more like a crime scene. And unlike the last time I was here, the time I do not bother knocking. Ava's long gone. After stealing the elixir and leaving Naddalin to fend for herself, she has no intention of returning.

I unlock the door with my mind and step in, taking a quick look around before

I move past the den and into the kitchen. Surprised to find the usually well-ordered room reduced to an absolute mess-the sink piled high with dirty glasses and dishes as the trash overflows to the floor. And even though I am sure it has not Ava who has done the, clearly someone is here.

I creep down the hall, peering into a series of empty rooms until I get to the indigo door at the end-the one that leads to Ava's so-called sacred space where she used to meditate and try to reach the dimensions beyond. Opening the door just a crack and squinting into the dark, making out two sleeping figures sprawled on the floor. Skimming my hand along the

wall and fruitlessly searching for a light, before remembering my ability to illuminate the room on my own only to find the last two people I ever expected to see.

'Rayne?' I kneel beside her, holding my breath as she rolls over and opens one eye.

'Oh Henry, Ever.' She rubs her eyes and struggles to sit. 'Only I am not Rayne, I'm Javion. Rayne's over there.'

I glance at her twin at the far side of the room, noting the scowl that crosses her face the second she realizes it is me.

'What're you doing here?' I ask, focusing on Javion again since she's always been the nicer of the two.

'We live here.' Sheer shrugs, tucking her wrinkled white shirt into her blue plaid skirt as she gets off the floor.

I glance between them, taking in their pale skin, large dark eyes, and straight, black, shoulder-length hair with the razor-slashed bangs, noticing how they are both still dressed in the same private school uniforms as the first day we met. But unlike in School where they always appear so clean and pristine, now they are pretty much the opposite-sadly disheveled and completely uncared for.

'But you can't live here. This is Ava's house.' Shake my head. The idea of them squatting here leaves me extremely unnerved. 'Maybe you should think about going home. You know, back to school with the other girl's?'

~*~

(Back at a castle- and at the school)

'We can't…'

Rayne pulls on her knee socks, making sure they are of exactly equal height, accidentally giving the only real clue that helps me tell them apart.

'Thanks to you, we're stuck here forever,' she mumbles, taking a moment to glare at me.

I glance at Javion, hoping she'll explain.

But she just shakes her head at her sister, before looking at me. 'Ava's gone.' Sher shrugs. 'But don't let Rayne give you the wrong impression. We are quite happy to see you. We had a running bet on how soon you'd show.'

My gaze darts between them, laughing nervously as I say, 'Oh, really? Who won?'

Rayne rolls her eyes and points at her sister. 'Sher did. I was sure you'd abandoned us for good.'

I pause, something about the way she just said that-'Wait, you mean you guys have been here the whole time?'

'We can't get back.' Javion shrugs. 'We've lost our magic.'

'Well, I'm sure I can help you return. I mean, you do want to return-right?' I look at them, seeing Rayne smirk as Javion just nods.

Knowing they will be a lot easier than they think since all I must do is make the portal, get them settled, then say my good-byes and make the return trip back to Laguna alone.

'We'd like that very much,' Javion says.

'And we would like to leave now,' Rayne adds, eyes narrowed. 'After all, it's the very least you can do.'

I swallow hard.

I deserve that, but I still wonder who is more desperate for them to leave, them or me?

I motion toward Rayne as I heard for the futon, wondering why neither of them thought to sleep on it instead of the floor.

'Come,' I say…

I was glancing over my shoulder.

'You sit here on my right, and Javion, you sit here.'

I pat the lumpy cushion on the sofa.

'Now grab my hands and close your eyes, then focus on seeing the portal with all of you.'

Imagining that golden Shermer of light as though it is before you.

Besides as soon as the image is clear, I want you to see yourself stepping right through, knowing I am right there beside you, keeping you safe.

Okay…?'

I peek at them, seeing them nod before we go through the motions, re-creating all the right steps.

But just as I step through the light and into that vast fragrant field, I open my eyes and find I'm alone.

'Told you,' Rayne says, the second I return. Standing before me, eyes angry, small, accusing, pale hands clutching her plaid skirted hips.

And it's all because we tried to help you!' 'Told you our magic is gone. We are stuck here now with no way to get back.

'Rayne!' Javion shakes her head at her sister, then glances at me with an apologetic look on her face.

'Well, it's true!' Rayne glares. 'I told you we shouldn't risk it. I told you she would not listen.

~*~

I saw it clear as day. The overwhelming possibility she'd make the wrong choice-which, I might add, she did!' She shakes her head and frowns. 'It went exactly as predicted. And now we're the ones paying the price.'

Oh, you're not the only ones, I think. Hoping they've lost their ability to read minds as well since I'm immediately shamed by the thought. No matter how much she's annoying me, I know she's right.

'Listen,' I say, swallowing hard as I glance between them, needing to defuse them. 'I know how bad you want to get back. Believe me, I do.

-And-

I'm going to do everything I can to help you.' I nod, seeing them glance at each other, two identical faces marred by complete disbelief. 'I mean, I'm not exactly sure how I'm going to do it, but just trust that I will. I'll do everything I can to help you get back. And in the meantime, I'll do everything I can to keep you both comfortable and safe. Scout's Jewell.'

'All?'

Rayne looks at me, rolling her eyes, and having a sigh. 'Just get us back to School,' she says, arms crossing her chest. 'That's all we want. Nothing short of that will do.'

I nod, refusing to let her get to me when I say, 'Understood. But if I'm going to help you, I'll need you to answer some questions.'

They look at each other, Rayne's gaze signaling a silent: No way, as Javion turns, nodding at me as she says, 'Okay.'

...And even though I'm not quite sure how to phrase it, it's something I've been wondering for a while now, so I just dive in. 'I'm sorry if this offends you, but I need to know-are you guys dead?' I hold my breath, fully expecting them to be mad, or at the very least insulted-pretty much any reaction but the laughter I get. Watching as they fall all over themselves, Rayne doubles over, slapping her knee, as

Javion rolls off the futon, practically convulsing. 'Well, you can't blame me for asking.' I frown, definitely the one who's insulted. 'I mean, we did meet in School where plenty of dead people hang out. Not to mention how you're both unnaturally pale.'

Rayne leans against the wall, fully recovered from her laughing fit and smirking at me. 'So, we're pale. Big deal.' She glances at her sister, then back at me. 'It's not like you're exactly rocking' a tan. And yet, you don't see us assuming you're a member of the dearly departed.'

I wince, knowing it's true, but still. 'Yeah, well, you had an unfair advantage. Thanks to Riley you knew all about me

long before we met. You know exactly who I am and what I am, and if I have any hope of helping you, then I'm going to have to know a few things too. So-o as much as you may resent it, as much as you may want to resist, the only way we're going to get anywhere is if you tell me your story.'

'Never,' Rayne says, staring at her sister, warning her not to rebel.

But Javion ignores her and turns right to me. 'We're not dead. Not even close... We're more like-refugees. Refugees from the past, if you will.'

I glance between them, thinking all I have to do is lower my guard, focus my quantum remote, and touch them for their

entire life story to be revealed, but figuring I should at least try to get their version first.

'A long time ago,' she starts, peering at her disapproving sister before taking a deep breath and forging ahead. 'A very long time ago, in fact, we were facing a-' She squinters her brow, searching for just the right word, nodding at me when she says, 'Well, let's just say we were about to become victims of a terribly dark event, one of the most shameful times in our history, but we escaped by fleeing to School. And then, well, I guess we lost track of time and we've been there ever since. Or at least

until last week when we came to help you.'

Rayne groans, dropping to the floor and burying her face in her hands, but Javion just ignores her, still looking at me when she says, 'But now our worst fear has come true. Our magic is gone, we've nowhere to go, and no idea how to survive in the place.'

'What sort of persecution did you flee?' I ask, watching her closely, searching for clues. 'And how long ago is very long ago? Just what are we dealing with here?' Wondering if their history stretches as far back as Naddalin's, or if they belong to a more recent past.

They gaze at each other, communicating a wordless agreement that shuts me right out. So I move toward Javion, grasping her hand so quickly she has no time to react. Immediately pulled into her mind-her world-seeing the story unfold as though I'm right there. Standing on the sidelines, an unnoticed observer, fully immersed in the chaos and fear of that day, witness to images so horrible I'm tempted to turn away.

Watching as an angry mob swarm their home, voices raised-torchers high-their aunt barring the door as best she can, making the portal and urging the twins toward the safety of School.

Just about to step through the portal and join them when the door gives way and the twins disappear. Separated from everything they once knew, having no idea what became of their aunt until a visit to the Great Halls of Learning showed them the torturous trial of false accusations she was forced to endure. Refusing to confess to any kind of sorcery, having taken the Wiccan Rede of 'An it harm none, do what ye will,' and knowing she'd done nothing wrong, she rebuffed her oppressor and herald hurl herald high-all the way to the gallows where she was brutally hung.

I stagger back, fingers seeking the amulet just under my tee, something

about their aunt's gaze so eerily familiar, leaving me shaky, unsettled, reminding myself that I'm safe, they're safe-that things like that don't happen these days.

'So now you know.' Javion shrugs as Rayne shakes her head. 'Our whole story. Everything about us. Do you blame us for choosing to hide?'

I glance between them, unsure what to say. 'I-' I clear my throat and start over. 'I'm so sorry. I had no idea.' I glance at Rayne, seeing how she refuses to look at me, then over at Javion who solemnly bows hurl herald. 'I had no idea you guys escaped the Salem Witch Trials.'

'Not exactly,' Rayne says, before Javion cheers in.

'What she means is we were never tried. Our aunt stood accused. One day she was revered as the most sought-after midwife, and the next, she was rounded up and taken away.' She sucks in her breath, eyes welling up as though it were yesterday.

'We would've gone with her, we had nothing to hide,' Rayne says, lifting her chin and narrowing her gaze. 'And it certainly wasn't Clara's fault that poor baby died. It's the father who did it. She didn't want the baby or its mother. So she did away with them both and blamed Clara. Crying so loud the entire town herald-but then Clara made the portal, and forced us to hide, and she was just

about to join us when-well, you know the rest.'

'But that was over three hundred years ago!' I cry, still unused to the idea of existence that long despite my immortality.

The twins shrug.

'So if you haven't been back since-' I shake my head, the monumental size of the problem just beginning to unfold. 'I mean, do you have any idea how much things have changed since you were last here? Really? It's like a whole different world from the one that you left.'

'It's not like we're idiots.' Rayne shakes hurl herald. 'Things progress in

School too, you know. New people arrive all the time, manifesting the things they're attached to, all the stuff they can't bear to let go.'

But that's not what I meant, in fact, not even close. I wasn't just referring to cars versus horse-drawn carriages, and trendy boutiques versus hand sewn-but more their ability to get along in the world-blending in, adapting, not standing out in the glaring way that they do! Taking in their razor-slashed bangs, their large dark eyes, and extremely pale skin, knowing their twenty-first-century makeover is far less about a uniform change than a complete and total overhaul.

'Besides, Riley prepared us,' Javion says, eliciting a loud groan from Rayne, and my full attention from me. 'Sher manifested a private school and convinced us to enroll. That's where these uniforms came from. Sher was our teacher, coaching us on all the modern ways, including our speech. She wanted us to return and was determined to prepare us for the trip. Partly because she wanted us to look after you, and partly because she thought we were crazy for missing out on our teens.'

I freeze, suddenly grasping a new understanding in Riley's interest in them- one that's got far less to do with me, and everything to do with her. 'How old are

you guys?' I whimper, looking to Javion for the answer. 'Or should I say, how old were you when you first arrived in School?' Knowing they haven't aged a day since.

'Thirteen,' Javion says, knitting her brow. 'Why?'

I close my eyes and shake my head, stifling a laugh as I think: I knew it!

Riley always dreamed of the day she'd be thirteen, a bona fide teenager having finally made it to the important double digits. But after dying at twelve, she chose to hang around the earth plane, living her adolescence vicariously through me. So it only makes sense she'd try to

convince Javion and Rayne to return, not wanting anyone else to miss out like her.

-And-

If Clara can find the strength, and Riley the hope, in situations so incredibly dire and bleak, surely I can overcome Naddalin.

I glance between the twins, knowing they can't stay here on their own or come home to live with Jaylynn and me, though there is someone who's quite able and ready, if not entirely willing to lend us a hand.

'Grab your stuff,' I say, heading for the door. 'I'm taking you to your new home.'

The second we step outside I realize we'll need a car. And since I'm more interested in speed than comfort, especially after seeing the way the twins cling to each other as they gaze around warily, I manifest something that'll get us there fast and quickly herd them in. Ordering Javion to sit on Rayne's lap as I get myself settled and step on the gas, navigating the streets with surprising skill, while the twins practically hang out the window, gaping at all that we pass.

'Have you guys been inside the whole time?' I glance at them, never having seen anyone react to the beauty of Laguna Beach in quite the same way.

They nod, never once averting their gaze. Squirming in their seat as I pull up to the gate. Allowing the uniformed guard to peer through the window and scrutinize them, before letting us in.

'Where are you taking us?' Rayne eyes me suspiciously. 'What's with the guards and big gates? Is this some kind of prison?'

I heard up the hill, glancing at her when I said, 'Don't you have gated communities in School?' Never actually having seen one myself, but then again I haven't lived there for the last three centuries as they have.

They shake their heads, eyes wide, clearly on edge.

'Not to worry.' I turn onto Naddalin's street and into her drive. 'It's not a prison, that's not what the gates are for. They're more to keep people out rather than in.'

'But why would you want to keep people out?' they ask, two childlike voices blending into one.

I squinted, having no idea how to answer since it's not like I was raised like that either, all the communities in my old hood were open access. 'I guess it's meant to keep people-' I start to say safe, but that's not it either. 'Anyway.' Shake my head. 'If you're going to live here, then you better get used to it. That's pretty much all there is.'

'But we're not going to live here,' Rayne says. 'You said this was just a temporary fix until you find a way to get us back, remember?'

I take a deep breath and grip the wheel harder, reminding myself how scared she must feel, no matter how bratty she gets.

'Of course it's temporary.' I nod, forcing a smile. Or at least it better be, because if not, someone's going to be extremely displeased. I climb out of the car and motion for them to follow, saying, 'Ready to see your new temporary home?'

I heard for the door, the two of them close at my heels as I stand right before it, debating whether or not I

should knock and wait for Naddalin to open it or just stride right in since he's probably asleep. And I'm just about to do the latter when Naddalin swings the door open, takes one look at me, and says, 'Are you okay?'

I smile, tacking on a telepathic message of: Before you say anything-anything at all-just try to stay calm and give me a chance to explain-her eyes curious, questioning as I say, 'Can we come in?'

She moves aside, eyes wide with shock when Javion and Rayne step out from behind me and barrel right into her. Skinny arms wrapped around her waist, gazing up at her adoringly as they squeal,

'Naddalin! It's you! It's really you!' And as nice as the little reunion is, I can't help but notice how their reaction to her, with all the love and excitement, is pretty much the opposite of their reaction to me.

'Hery.' She greets, tangling their hair and bending down to plant a kiss on the top of their heads. 'How long has it happened?' She pulls away and squints.

'Last week,' Rayne says, complete adoration displayed on her face. 'Flashes before Ever added her blood to the antidote and wrecked everything.'

'Rayne!' Javion bounces between her sister and me, shaking her head. But I just let it go. This is one battle I'll never win.

'I meant ere that.' Naddalin squints into the distance, trying to remember the date.

They look at her, a mischievous gleam in their eyes when they say, 'It was just over six years ago when Ever was ten!'

I gape, eyes practically popping out of my head as Naddalin laughs. 'Ah, yes. And I have you two to thank for helping me find her. And since you know how much she means to me, I would relish your kindness moving her. That's not too much to ask-is it?' She chucks Rayne under the chin, causing her to smile as her cheeks flush bright pink.

'So, to what do I owe the incredible Jewel?' She leads us into the still empty living room. 'Of being reunited with my long-lost friends, who, I might add, haven't aged a day since we met.'

They look at each other and giggle, clearly prepared to be charmed by anything she says. And before I can even think of a reply, find the right words to slowly break her in and get her used to the idea of their living with her, they look at each other and shout, 'Ever said we could live with you!'

Naddalin glances at me, a smile still planted on her face, as a look of pure horror creeps into her eyes.

'Temporarily,' I add, gaze upon her, sending a barrage of telepathic red tulips her way. 'Just until I find a way to get them back to School, or their magic returns, whichever comes first.' Tacking on a mental note of Remember when you said you wanted to improve your karma, to make up for your past? Well, what better way than to help someone in need? And the way you can keep the house since you will need the extra space. It is the perfect solution. Everybody wins! Nodding and smiling so eagerly I am like a bobblehead doll.

Naddalin glances first at me, then the twins, laughing and shaking her head when he says, 'Of course you can stay.

For as long as you need. So, what do you say we all heard upstairs so you can pick out your rooms?'

I sigh, my perfect boyfriend proving herself even more perfect. Following behind as the twins race up the stairs- happy, giggling, completely transformed now that they are in Naddalin's care.

'Can we have the room?' They ask, eyes lighting up as they stand in the doorway of Naddalin's special room that is still devoid of her things.

'No!' I answer too quickly, wincing when they turn, eyes narrowed and glaring at me. But even though I feel bad about the negative start, I have decided to return the room to its normal state, and

there is no way I can do that if they are camping in it. 'It's taken,' I add, knowing it did nothing to soften the blow. 'But there is plenty more, the place is huge, you'll see. There's even a pool!'

Javion and Rayne glance at each other before marching down the hall heads bobbing together, whispering, not bothering to hide their annoyance with me.

You could have just given it to them, Naddalin thinks, close enough to send a charge through my veins.

I shake my head and walk silently alongside her, telepathically replying, I want to see it filled with your things. Even though they no longer mean anything to

you, they mean a great deal to me. You cannot toss out the past-cannot just turn your back on the things that defined you.

She stops, turning to me as she says, 'Ever, we are not defined by our things. It's not the clothes that we wear, the cars that we drive, the art we acquire-it's not where we live-but how we live that defines us.' Her gaze bores into mine, as she gathers me into a telepathic embrace, the effect seeming so real, it robs me of breath. 'It's our actions that are remembered long after we're gone,' she adds, smoothing my hair as her lips telepathically meet mine. ...True. I smile, enhancing the image he created with tulips and sunsets and rainbows and

cupids and all manner of clichéd Dadaistic themes that make us both laugh. Except that we are immortal, I add, decided to sway her to my side. Which means none of that applies. So, with that in mind, maybe we can just- but I do not even get to finish before the twins call for us, shouting, 'The room! I want one!'

Since the twins are so used to being together, I was sure they would want to share the same space and even get bunk beds or something. But the moment they checked out the size of the next room, and the one after that, they each staked their claim and never looked back. Spending the next several hours directing Naddalin and me to decorate down to

their most minute specifications, demanding we manifest beds, dressers, and shelves, only to change their minds, have us empty the room, and start all over again.

But if Naddalin was using her magic, I did not complain. I was far too relieved to see her manifesting again, even if she was still refusing to manifest anything for herself. By the time we finished, the sun was starting to rise, and I knew I had better return home before Jaylynn woke up and noticed I was gone.

'Don't be surprised if I don't make it to school today,' she says, walking me to the front door.

I sigh, hating the thought of going without her.

'I can't leave them here on their own. Not until they get settled in.' She shrugs, hooking her thumb over her shoulder and pointing upstairs where the twins are finally, mercifully, asleep in their beds.

I nod, knowing she's right and vowing to get them back to school soon before they get too comfortable here.

'I'm not sure that's the solution,' she says, sensing my thoughts.

I squint, unsure where she's going, but getting an uncomfortable ping in my gut nonetheless.

'I've been thinking-' She cocks her head to the side, thumb tracing her stubble-lined chin. 'They've been through a lot-losing their home, their families, everything they've ever known and loved-their lives taken so abruptly, they hadn't had a chance to even live them-' She shakes her head. 'They deserve a real childhood, you know? A fresh start in the world-'

I gape, wanting to respond but the words just won't come. Because while I also want them to be happy and safe and all of those things, as far as the rest goes, we're no longer on the same page. I was planning for a short little visit, a couple of days, or at the very worst weeks. Never

once did I entertain the idea of becoming surrogate parents, especially to twins who're just a few years younger than me.

'It was just a thought.' He shrugs. 'Ultimately, the decision is theirs. It's their life.'

I swallow stimulating and prevent my gaze, telling myself there is annihilation that has to be settled just yet, going toward my manifested car when Naddalin says, 'Always. Relly, a pickup truck?'

Part: 3

She cocks her head to the side, squinting in faux contemplation and rubbing her chin as she says, 'Really?

Most people claim to see a resemblance. Though, I have to admit, I'm with you, never seen it myself.'

'You're related to Lina?' I gape, hoping my voice didn't sound as panicked to her ears as it did mine.

'Sher's my grandmother.' He nods. 'Name's Naddalin, by the way.'

She offers her hand, long, tanned, fingers extended, waiting for mine. But even though my curiosity is piqued, I can't do it. Despite my interest, despite my wondering why she makes me feel so-flustered and off balance-I cannot risk the barrage of knowledge a single touch brings when my psyche is disturbed.

I nod, responding with the stupid, embarrassing sort of half-wave, as I mumble my name. Trying not to wince when she gives me an odd look and lowers her hand again.

'So, now that that's covered-' She slings her damp towel over her shoulder, sending a spray of sand through the room. 'I'm back to my original question, what are you doing in here?'

I turn, feigning sudden interest in a book on dream interpretation when I say, 'I'm sticking with my original answer, which was browsing, in case you've forgotten. Surely you allow browsers in here?' I turn, meeting her gaze-those amazing sea-green eyes reminding me of

an ad for a tropical getaway. Something about them is so-indefinable-startling-and yet strangely familiar-though I am sure I have never seen her before.

Now laughing, pushing a tangle of golden dreads off her face and exposing a scar slicing right through her brow, gaze landing just to my right as she says, 'And yet, after all the summers I've spent here, watching customers browse the merchandise, I've never once seen someone browse quite like you.'

Her lips pull at the sides, as her eyes study mine. Then I turn, cheeks hurting, heart racing, taking a moment to compose myself before turning back to say, 'You've never seen someone browse

the back cover? That is a little odd, don't you think?'

'Not with their eyes closed.' She tilts her head to the side and focuses on the space to my right once again.

I swallow hard, flustered, shaky, knowing I need to change the subject before I sink any deeper. 'Maybe you should be more concerned with how I got in here instead of what I am doing in here,' I say, wishing I could take it back the second it is out.

She looks at me, gazes narrowed. 'Figured I left the door open again. Are you saying I didn't?'

'Nope!' I shake my head, hoping she does not notice the way my cheeks color and heat. 'No, that's-that's exactly what I'm saying. You did leave the door open,' I add, trying not to fidget, blink, press my lips together, or otherwise give myself away. 'Wide open in fact, which is not only a waste of air-conditioning but totally-' I stop, my stomach going weird when I see the smile at play on her lips.

'So, a friend of Lina's, huh?' She moves toward the register, dropping her towel on the counter in a wet, sandy thud. 'Never heard her mention you before.'

'Well, we weren't exactly friends.' I shrug, hoping it did not look as awkward as it felt. 'I mean, I met her once and she

helped me with-wait, why did you just phrase it like that? You know, all past tense. Is Lina okay?'

She nods, perching on a stool, grabbing a purple cardboard box from a drawer, and flipping through a bunch of receipts. 'Sher's on one of her annual retreats. Picks a different one each year. The time it is Mexico to linger within. Trying to decide if the Mayans were right and the world will end in 2012. What's your take?'

She looks at me, green eyes curious, insistent, boring right into mine. But I just scratch my arm and shrug, never having heard that theory before and wondering if it applies to Naddalin

and me. Is that when we will hear for the Shadow worlds, or will we be forced to wander barren Earth-the last two survivors responsible for repopulating the land-only-irony alert-if we touch, Naddalin dies- I shake my head, eager to escape that thread before it can take hold and mess with my head. Besides, I am here for a reason and I need to stick with the plan.

'So how do you know her? If you weren't exactly friends.'

'I met her through Ava,' I say, hating the feel of her name on my lips.

She rolls her eyes, mumbling something unintelligible and shaking her head.

'So, you know her?' I look at her, allowing my gaze to travel to her face, her neck, her shoulders, her smooth tanned chest, making my way down to her navel, before forcing myself to look away again.

'Yeah, I know her.' She pushers the box aside, gaze meeting mine. 'Just up and disappeared the other day-into thin air from what I can tell-'

Oh, you do not know the half of it, I think, carefully watching her face.

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